(c) and (d) Recognising the genuine need of some passport applicants for urgent issue of passport the Government is formulating a 'Tatkal Scheme' under which for an additional amount, an out-of-turn passport will be issued within seven working days to eligible applicants who can be issued passport on post-police verification basis.

(e) Government is constantly endeavouring to improve the issue of passports and add to the convenience of passport applicants. Government have adopted several measures for streamlining the entire process of issue of passports. These inter alia include-increasing the availability of application forms by allowing printing, distribution and sale at nominal cost of passport forms by approved private printers; establishing 15 Passport Collection Centres to accept passport applications, in addition to the existing 28 Passport Offices; computerising processing procedures in 18 of the 28 Passport Offices; launch of the Central Passport Organisation web site; holding of Passport Adalats; simplification of police verification procedures etc. Among the new measures proposed in the coming months are introduction of machine writing of passport booklets at the Regional Passport Office, Delhi and transfer of personal particulars of passport holders from Index Cards to CD-ROMs.

International Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation

2365. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the response of Government on "Kunming Declaration" made in International Conference on Regional Economic Co-operation among China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar organised by Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming and Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi 15th—17th August, 1999;

(b) the action initiated on these issues;

(c) the details of initiatives to show India's leading role in strengthening regional cooperation by promotion of cross-border trade;

(d) the response of concerned countries to this effect; and

(e) the reaction of Government to proposal from few North Eastern States to utilise Stillwell Road as an alternative commercial route?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (e) A non-Governmental "International Conference on Regional Economic Co-operation and Development among China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar" was organised in Kunming, China on August 15—17, 1999 by the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Yunnan Provincial and Technological Research Centre. India, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar participated in the Conference. The Kunming conference was a follow-up to the Seminar on Regional development in India and China organised in New Delhi on November 19-20, 1998 by the Institute of Chinese Studies in Collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. The Kunming Conference discussed measures to promote regional and sub-regional economic co-operation among the four countries.

Government encourage the development of regional and sub-regional economic co-operation, including between North-east India and neighbouring regions. Government also support measures to promote mutually beneficial cross-border trade among countries in the region.

Selection of Hindi Teachers by ICCR

2366. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether ICCR had invited applications from universities, educational institutions for selection of visiting Professors for teaching Hindi abroad under Cultural Exchange Programme;

(b) if so, the details of the names sponsored by universities and educational institutions;

(c) whether the interview fixed for last week of November, 1999 was postponed to 9th December, 1999 and interview list was amended and only influential candidates are being called for interview leaving aside seniority and qualifications;